

(19)



(11)

EP 1 959 850 B1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION

(45) Date of publication and mention
of the grant of the patent:
03.03.2010 Bulletin 2010/09

(51) Int Cl.:
A61B 17/70 (2006.01)

(21) Application number: **06845088.1**

(86) International application number:
PCT/US2006/046996

(22) Date of filing: **12.12.2006**

(87) International publication number:
WO 2007/070417 (21.06.2007 Gazette 2007/25)

(54) **SCREW AND ROD FIXATION ASSEMBLY AND DEVICE**

SCHRAUBEN- UND STANGENFIXIERUNGSANORDNUNG UND -VORRICHTUNG

ENSEMBLE ET DISPOSITIF DE FIXATION DE VIS ET DE TIGE

(84) Designated Contracting States:
**AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR
HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC NL PL PT RO SE SI
SK TR**

(30) Priority: **15.12.2005 US 300994**

(43) Date of publication of application:
27.08.2008 Bulletin 2008/35

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EP 1 959 850 B1

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Description

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This patent application is a Continuation-In-Part application of United States Patent Application Serial No. 10/823,369, filed April 13, 2004 and published as US 2004/0193160 A1, which is a Continuation of United States Patent Application Serial No. 10/124,945, filed April 18, 2002 and published as US 2003/0199873 A1, now United States Patent No. 6,740,086.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention relates to a locking mechanism in accordance with the preamble of claim 1.

2. BACKGROUND ART

[0003] Several techniques and systems have been developed for correcting and stabilizing the spine and for facilitating fusion at various levels of the spine. Stabilization of the spine for various conditions, including degenerative disk disease, scoliosis, spondylolisthesis, and spinal stenosis, often require attaching implants to the spine and then securing the implants to spinal rods. Such spinal fixation devices can immobilize the vertebrae of the spine and can alter the alignment of the spine over a large number of vertebrae by connecting at least one elongate rod to the sequence of selected vertebrae. These rods can span a large number of vertebrae, such as three or four. The spine anatomy, however, rarely allows for three or more implants to be directly in line. In order to allow for this irregularity, the rod must be contoured to the coronal plane.

[0004] Spinal fixation has become a common approach in fusion of vertebrae and treating fractures and the above listed spinal disorders. A common device used for spinal fixation is a bone fixation plate assembly. Typical bone fixation plate assemblies have a relatively flat, rectangular plate with a plurality of apertures there-through. Additional assemblies include an implantation fixation system that locks a rod to several vertebrae. In these assemblies, as in with other spinal fixation systems, they utilize various fasteners, such as bone screws, to secure the bone fixation plate assembly or the implantation fixation assembly to the desired and targeted vertebrae of the patient. These screws vary in design and shape depending upon their desired location and use thereof.

[0005] In particular, polyaxial locking screws are used with these devices. The key to the polyaxial screws used with these systems is having the screw head being securely fastened to the vertebrae and to the assembly thereof. Thus, the polyaxial screws must be used in conjunction with a type of screw head securing device that

provides a strong lock to the polyaxial screw. Any movement of the screw can be detrimental towards the healing process of the spine. Further, additional damage can occur if there is movement of the screw once it has been fixed to the vertebrae. Therefore, movement of the screw must be minimized or eliminated.

[0006] There are numerous polyaxial screws existing in the market today and known in the prior art. Additionally, numerous devices exist that provide a securing means for locking the polyaxial screw. For example, U.S. Patent No. 5,554,157, U.S. Patent No. 5,549,608, and U.S. Patent No. 5,586,984 all to Errico et al. disclose polyaxial locking screws and coupling element devices for use with a rod fixation apparatus. The '157 Patent discloses a coupling element including an interior axial passage having an interior surface that is inwardly curvate at the lower portion thereof such that it comprises a socket for polyaxially retaining a spherical head of a screw. The coupling element further includes a pair of vertically oriented opposing channels extending down from the top of the coupling element, which define therebetween a rod receiving seat. The channel further provides for walls of the upper portion to a pair of upwardly extending members, each including an exterior threading disposed on the uppermost portion thereof for receiving a locking nut. During the implantation of the assembly, the locking nut seals against the top of the rod that in turn seats on top of the screw head. The nut causes the rod to be locked between the nut and the screw and the screw to be locked in the socket.

[0007] The '608 Patent discloses a modification wherein a locking ring is disposed about the exterior of the lower portion of the coupling element and provides an inward force on an outwardly tapered portion upon downward translation thereof. As a result, the interior chamber crush locks a screw head therein to eliminate the polyaxial nature of the screw element coupling.

[0008] The '984 Patent discloses a polyaxial orthopedic device including a coupling element having a tapered lower portion having a slotted interior chamber in which a curvate head of a screw is initially polyaxially disposed. The coupling element includes a recess for receiving a rod of the implant apparatus. A locking ring is disposed about the lower portion of the coupling element and provides an inward force on the outwardly tapered portion upon downward translation thereof. The vertical slots are caused to close and crush, thereby locking the screw head within the interior chamber thereof.

[0009] U.S. Patent No. 6,280,442 to Barker et al. discloses a complex locking mechanism having a screw head with a complex head geometry, a crown member, and an outer rigid body. Locking occurs by compressing the crown member against the complex head, which compresses the head against the rigid seat. This compression crushes the machine ridges on the head and secures the screw therein.

[0010] Another example of a common locking mechanism is a type of collet that has a spherical seat with a

flexible portion that is designed to deflect around the screw. By compressing the flexible portion against a rigid, outer wall, the collet is compressed against the head to cause locking therein. Examples of these collets are found in numerous patents. For example, U.S. Patent No. 6,053,917 to Sherman et al. discloses a multiaxial bone screw assembly that includes a bone screw having a partially spherical head. Additionally, the assembly includes a receiver member that has a central bore that defines a tapered recess to receive a contracting collet carrying the head of the bone screw. The collet defines a partially spherical recess to receive the head of the bone screw and includes deflectable fingers that substantially surround the screw head. As a set screw is tightened into the receiver member, the set screw compresses the rod against the collet, which presses the collet into the tapered recess of the receiver member, thereby deflecting the fingers of the collet against the bone screw head.

[0011] Another patent, U.S. Patent No. 5,964,760 to Richelsoph, discloses a spinal implant fixation assembly that includes a bone fixation member. A rod receiving seat is operatively connected to the bone fixation element for seating a portion of a rod therein. A locking mechanism, in the form of a nut and locking ring, engages the rod receiving seat for forcing an inner wall of the rod receiving seat to contour around and engage the rod seated therein and for locking and fixing the rod relative to the inner housing. The assembly further includes a screw head receiving insert for obtaining a head of a screw therein. The insert is moveable within the assembly between a locked position entrapping the screw head and an unlocked position wherein the screw head enters or escapes.

[0012] Other polyaxial screw patents that utilize a similar collet are disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 6,010,503 to Richelsoph, U.S. Patent No. 5,910,142 to Tatar (disclosing the use of a spherical collet that is compressed between the screw head and the rod), and U.S. Patent No. 5,891,145 to Morrison et al. (disclosing the use of a very complex double wedge locking mechanism).

[0013] More specifically, the '142 Patent to Tatar discloses a polyaxial pedicle screw device for use with a rod implant apparatus, which utilizes a rod mounted ferrule. The device further includes a screw having a curvate head and a rod receiving body. The body has a rod receiving channel and an axial bore into which the head of the screw is inserted. The rod mounted ferrule seats into a small curvate recess in the upper portion of the screw head such that the rod may enter the body at a variety of angles while maintaining secure seating against the head of the screw. The insertion of a top, setscrew compresses down on the ferrule, locking the rod in position and onto the screw head. Further, the body is locked in position to completely secure the assembly.

[0014] The '145 Patent to Morrison et al. discloses a spinal fixation assembly that includes a bone engaging fastener and an elongated member such as a spinal rod.

The fixation assembly is a multiaxial assembly that permits fixation of the bone engaging fastener to the spinal rod at any of the continuous ranges of angles relative to the rod in three dimensional space. The fixation assembly includes a receiver member having a bore therethrough, the walls of which are tapered near the bottom, and a channel communicating with the bore and having an upper opening at the top of the receiver member for insertion of a spinal rod. An outer wedge member and an inner wedge member are also included. Both members have the general shape of a washer and a bore therethrough. In each wedge member, the respective bore is not parallel to the central axis of the respective wedge member. Additionally, the outside surfaces of the wedge members may be tapered and the respective bores may be tapered so as to self-lock when seated and tightened. The bone engaging fastener fits within the bore of the inner wedge member, which in turn fits within the bore of the outer wedge member, which in turn fits within the tapered sides of the receiver member. When the desired position of the bone engaging fastener in three dimensional space is attained, the components are seated to achieve a tight friction fit.

[0015] U.S. Patent No. 6,063,089 to Errico et al. discloses a polyaxial orthopedic device for use with a rod implant apparatus that includes a screw having a head, a tubular body having holes on top, side, and bottom thereof, and a rod coupling element. The head of the screw is disposed in the body with the shaft of the screw extending out of the bottom hole, such that the body and the screw may initially rotate relative to one another. The rod coupling element has a ball shaped end that sits in the body with the remainder of the rod coupling element extending out of the side hole of the body, such that the rod coupling element and the body are initially polyaxially coupled relative to one another. The ball end of the rod coupling element is disposed on top of the head of the screw. A set screw is provided on top of the body, the tightening of which causes the ball, head, and body to be crushed locked together, thereby preventing further relative motion.

[0016] A pedicle screw with a closure device for the fixing of elastic rod elements is known from US 2005/0096659 A1. A device for immobilizing a connecting rod in an osseous anchoring element of a rachidian implant is disclosed in US 2005/0027292 A1. A further osteosynthesis device is described in DE 199 51 145 A1. US 2002/0120272 A1 concerns a device for securing spinal rods. Moreover, US 2005/0080419 A1 discloses a device for connecting a longitudinal member to a bone.

[0017] In all of the existing prior art, particularly those described herein, the polyaxial screws utilize a complex locking mechanism and additional locking parts to prevent the movement of the polyaxial screw. Typically, the more complex the locking mechanism, larger components are needed and manufacturing costs are expensive. Locking and achieving strong hold values become more difficult with more parts. Further, the sizes of the

various fixation plates and fixation assemblies are critical to these types of surgeries. Bulky components can cause soft tissue irritation, as well as compromise the facet joints at the end of a fusion. Minimizing the size of the implants used is critical in spinal surgery. Soft tissue irritation resulting from extensions of implants is a common occurrence. Many times, it is caused by the implant being thick relative to its environment. For example, implants can be too thick to be sufficiently covered within the muscle tissue. Hence, a reduction in the overall thickness of the implant is a critical advantage.

[0018] Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide a screw head securing mechanism or device that provides a strong, effective, and secure lock of the screw head in its desired position. Additionally, it is a further object of the invention to provide a screw head securing mechanism or device that is minimal in size and has a reduced amount of components to provide for a simpler, more effective, and less cumbersome device for fixing screws.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0019] According to the present invention, these objects are achieved by a locking mechanism in accordance with claim 1. Further preferred embodiments of the locking mechanism are set forth in the dependent claims.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] Other advantages of the present invention are readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

Figure 1 is a cross sectional view of one embodiment of a fixing mechanism wherein Figure 1A shows a screw head (as indicated by the circle) that is freely moveable within a non-gripping portion of the fixing mechanism and Figure 1B shows the screw head securely fixed within a gripping portion of the inner surface wall of the fixing mechanism of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a detailed, cross-sectional view of an embodiment of a screw and rod fixation assembly;

Figure 3 is a detailed, cross-sectional view of an embodiment of the fixing mechanism, wherein the fixing mechanism is interiorly tapered at a distal end;

Figure 4 illustrates another embodiment of the screw and rod fixation assembly where the screw head is securely fixed within the fixing mechanism, wherein a minimal amount of material is utilized for the fixing mechanism in order to minimize x-ray obstruction;

Figure 5 illustrates another embodiment of the fixing mechanism that utilizes composite polymer material in the outer shell with an inner metallic component to form a hybrid load sharing structure for securely

fixing the screw head within fixing mechanism;

Figure 6 is a perspective view of a substantially annular ring used in an embodiment of the screw and rod fixation assembly wherein the substantially annular ring has a spherical indentation and a flat portion as well as a through hole and the insert can be any shape to provide mechanical and/or frictional force to the screw head;

Figure 7 is a perspective view of a rod seating mechanism including a cylindrical and/or tapered outer surface having extending flexible portions for engaging a spinal rod as a locking mechanism is tightened upon the extending flexible portions, thus deflecting the extending flexible portions around the rod situated therein;

Figure 8 is a cross-sectional view of the rod seating mechanism shown in Figure 7;

Figure 9 is a perspective view of the locking mechanism (a set screw) for use with the rod seating mechanism shown in Figure 7, wherein the locking mechanism has an inner chamber or spherical portion therein that engages the extending flexible portions of the locking mechanism to ensure that the extending flexible portions are deflected inward and contoured around the rod seated therein;

Figure 10 is a perspective view of an embodiment of the screw and rod fixation assembly including a screw, a fixing mechanism, the rod seating mechanism, and the locking mechanism, wherein the screw head is textured for enhancing screw head locking within the fixing mechanism;

Figure 11 is a perspective, line drawing of the screw and rod fixation assembly illustrated in Figure 10;

Figure 12A is an enlarged side-view of the rod seating mechanism of an embodiment of the present invention, wherein the rod seating mechanism seats the rod therein and the extending flexible portions of the rod seating mechanism are in an extended condition, while Figure 12B is a cross-sectional view illustrating the rod seating mechanism with the extending flexible portions in a compressed condition contouring around and engaging against the rod thereon;

Figure 13 is a perspective, side-view illustration of another embodiment of the screw and rod fixation assembly including a solid, substantially annular ring;

Figure 14 is a perspective, side-view of the screw and rod fixation assembly including a substantially annular ring that is split to allow maximum flexibility of the substantially annular ring within the fixing mechanism;

Figure 15 is a perspective view of the fixing mechanism wherein an outer surface is a polymer, composite, or other material and the fixing mechanism includes a spherical screw seat that is situated within the gripping portion of the inner surface wall that also allows deflection therein;

Figure 16 is a side-view of the fixing mechanism and rod seating mechanism of the present invention wherein the rod seating mechanism deflects over the rod when pushed into the body of the fixing mechanism and tabs on the side of the rod seating mechanism engage apertures or indentations in the body of the fixing mechanism to ensure the rod seating mechanism remains locked;

Figure 17 is a perspective view of another embodiment of the fixing mechanism wherein a threaded locking mechanism is pressed into the substantially tubular body of the fixing mechanism after the rod is introduced into the fixing mechanism therein that engages a groove on the inner surface wall and the locking mechanism is tightened to lock the entire screw and rod fixation assembly;

Figure 18 is a cross-sectional view of an embodiment of the screw and rod fixation assembly wherein the head of a structure, as opposed to a screw, is within the gripping portion of the fixing mechanism, and movement of the head of the structure further into the gripping portion locks the screw and rod fixation assembly;

Figure 19 is a cross sectional view of an embodiment of the screw and rod fixation assembly wherein the locking mechanism is a non-threaded cap;

Figure 20 is a cross sectional view of an embodiment of the screw and rod fixation assembly wherein the locking mechanism is a non-threaded tapered cap;

Figure 21 is a cross sectional view of an embodiment of the screw and rod fixation assembly wherein the locking mechanism is a non-threaded, tapered, and grooved cap;

Figures 22 A-E are side views of a cam for use in the locking mechanism of the present invention; and

Figure 23 is a cross sectional view of an embodiment of the of the screw and rod fixation assembly wherein the locking mechanism is a non-threaded cam lock cap.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0021] A screw and rod fixation assembly constructed in accordance with the present invention is generally indicated by 10 in the Figures. Generally, the screw and rod fixation assembly 10 fixes and/or locks a screw, a rod, or both. Additionally, the screw and rod fixation assembly 10 includes various components in different combinations. For instance, the screw and rod fixation assembly 10 can include any, all, or combinations of a screw, fixing mechanism, substantially annular ring, rod seating mechanism, and locking mechanism.

[0022] The present invention provides for locking of a screw head without any manipulation of the fixing mechanism thereof. The fixing mechanism inherently grips the screw head rigidly, preventing movement of the screw head that can occur because of vertebrae movement, without application of force or manipulation of the fixing

mechanism as required to ensure the fixed gripping. Rather, entry of the screw head into the locking or gripping portion of the fixing mechanism causes locking to occur around the screw head by means of compression force thereon. Basically, the fixing mechanism is a passageway including side-walls and an inherent locking mechanism for gripping and locking the screw head as the screw head enters through the passageway and into the fixing mechanism. The passageway can be a substantially tubular body and be composed of semi-flexible material.

[0023] The present invention has numerous advantages over the prior art. These advantages include, but are not limited to, simplifying currently existing polyaxial screw fixation assemblies. For instance, no expensive collet or other similar screw head holding mechanism is used with the present invention. Additionally, the present invention is significantly smaller in size, diameter, circumference, and overall dimensions than other devices existing in the prior art. Because the present invention does not utilize any additional components such as a collet, crown, or cap that exceeds the diameter of the screw head, the size of the present invention is greatly reduced. Thus, the present invention, and in particular, the fixing mechanism, only needs to be large enough to allow the screw to enter or be seated therein. Another advantage of the present invention is that the screw and/or screw head is secured more uniformly and in a more controlled manner.

[0024] Further, the tolerance issues of collet designs, crowns, caps, and complex screw retaining mechanism geometries are eliminated. Moreover, the screw placed within the present invention can be securely locked without any internal mechanism to create a fixed screw. An instrument can easily push down the screw to the proper seating position to create a locked screw at any desired angle, even after the instrument is removed. The term "elastic range" as used herein is the limit of stress within which deformation of a body of material completely disappears after the removal of stress, tension, and/or force upon the body of material. Elasticity is the ability of a material to return to its original dimensions after removal of stress, tension, or force placed upon the material. Once the stress, tension, or forces exceed the elastic range however, the material cannot return to its original dimensions and is forever deformed. The term "deformation range" as used herein means the excessive amount of strain, force, or load outside the elastic range wherein deformation is maintained and the body of material no longer can return to its original dimensions. Basically, deformation occurs wherein a change in form is produced by external forces or loads that act on the body of material.

[0025] The term "screw" 12 as used herein means a simple machine of the inclined plane type including a spirally grooved solid cylinder and a correspondingly grooved hollow cylinder into which it fits. The screw 12 can be any type of screw such as set screw and can be

any size, shape or design as is known to those of skill in the art. In certain cases, it can be desirable to have the screw 12 have a screw head 14 of another shape and/or size.

[0026] The term "rod" 16 as used herein means a substantially cylindrical body having a desired length. With regard to the present invention, the rod 16 is typically a rod 16 used within a human body to aid in the alignment of bones, particularly the vertebrae.

[0027] One important feature of the screw fixation assembly 10, and more particularly the fixing mechanism, is the use of a semi-flexible material as opposed to a rigid material. As is known to those of skill in the material strength art, materials such as metals and composites thereof have an elastic range and a deformation range. For example, if a sample of a material is placed in tension and not allowed to exceed the elastic range, the sample will stretch.

[0028] Elastic stretching occurs in such a manner that upon release of the tension, the material will return to its original dimensions. By adapting this property to the present invention, the wall of the fixing mechanism acts as a controllable spring that can effectively be used to exert a uniform compressive load on a head portion of a screw, shaft, or other component. The elastic stretching occurs by introducing a head portion that is larger than the internal dimensions of the fixing mechanism. This forces the fixing mechanism to expand to accept the head portion. In a similar fashion as a spring, the fixing mechanism would return to its original dimensions upon removal of the head portion. However, while the head portion is within the fixing mechanism, the fixing mechanism exerts a compressive force on the head portion. Thus, the fixing mechanism operates by inherently gripping the screw head rigidly, preventing movement of the screw head without the application of force or manipulation of the fixing mechanism by another means.

[0029] This property of the expansion of the wall of the fixing mechanism within its elastic range and the resultant force generated inward around the head portion is referred to as a "spring reaction." Outside of this elastic range, the material permanently deforms and will not return to its original dimensions. Therefore, it is essential to stay within the elastic range of the material in order to have a controllable reaction in which to use the compressive forces created therein.

[0030] The compressive forces created by the expansion of the wall of the fixing mechanism can be readily controlled by altering the material, material thickness, coatings, or otherwise modifying the material of the fixing mechanism. The head portion can also be altered to be of any material and hardness. A softer material would allow for more compensation for tolerances on the dimensions of the components, while a harder material could provide a more controlled expansion of the fixing mechanism.

[0031] Entry of the screw head into the gripping or locking portion of the fixing mechanism causes gripping or

locking to occur around the screw head by means of compression force thereon. Generally, the fixing mechanism is a passageway including side-walls and an inherent locking mechanism for gripping and locking the screw head as the screw head enters through the passageway and into the locking mechanism. The passageway is a substantially tubular body, while the inherent locking mechanism is a semi-flexible portion of the side-wall. Another manner in which to describe the fixing mechanism is that it is a single-walled vessel made of semi-flexible material.

[0032] The present invention can be constructed from any suitable material known to those of skill in the art. Preferably, the present invention is constructed from material that is compatible with use in the environments into which they are placed. The present invention can be constructed of various metallic materials that include, but are not limited to, titanium, stainless steel, and any other suitable metallic alloys known to those of skill in the art. Additional materials can also be utilized either alone or in combination with the above-described metallic materials. For instance, various plastics, fibers, and other polymers can be used in conjunction with the various metallic materials. These combinations can be used to construct various components or portions of the present invention. Moreover, other types of coatings can be placed on various portions of the present invention in order to improve durability, strength, and utilization thereof. Typically though, any of the material used to construct the present invention should be very strong, non-reactive, and non-antigenic to biological systems if they are used in that environment. If the present invention is used outside of biological systems however, the aforementioned characteristics are not necessarily required.

[0033] There are numerous embodiments of the present invention. As such, similar structures amongst the several embodiments are shown by prime numbers in the various Figures. Although there are numerous embodiments disclosed and described herein, each of the embodiments includes a variation of the fixing mechanism of the present invention.

[0034] The screw and rod fixation assembly 10 includes a screw 12 having a screw head 14. The screw and rod fixation assembly 10, and more specifically the fixing mechanism 18, grips and secures the screw head 14. Optionally, the screw and rod fixation assembly fixes a rod 16. The screw and rod fixation assembly 10 includes the fixing mechanism 18 for fixing the screw head 14 from movement relative to the screw and rod fixation assembly 10. The fixing mechanism 18 includes an inner surface wall 20 having a gripping portion 22 and a non-gripping portion 24. The fixing mechanism 18 operatively engages the screw head 14 and ultimately the screw 12. The fixing mechanism is basically a passageway or single-walled vessel made of semi-flexible material. As described above, the fixing mechanism 18, and more particularly the gripping portion 22, securely grips the screw head 14 through compression forces generated by the spring re-

action of the semi-flexible material. To reiterate, the spring reaction occurs from the screw head 14 stretching the gripping portion 22 beyond its original dimensions, but within the material's elastic range. Thus, the gripping portion 22 has a spring reaction to return back to its original dimensions that results in creating compression forces onto the screw head 14. As a result, the screw head 14 is securely gripped within the gripping portion 22.

[0035] The screw and rod fixation assembly 10 includes a substantially annular ring 26 for guiding and providing mechanical and frictional force to the screw head 14. Moreover, the screw fixation assembly 10 includes a rod seating mechanism 28 operatively engaged to the screw head 14 and has at least one flexible portion 46 capable of being compressed against the rod 16 seated within the rod seating mechanism 28. The rod seating mechanism 28 also includes a tapered outer surface end 34. Alternatively, the rod seating mechanism 28 can be cylindrically shaped.

[0036] The screw and rod fixation assembly 10 includes a locking mechanism, generally shown at 36 in the Figures. The locking mechanism 36 engages the rod 16 and the rod seating mechanism 28. The locking mechanism 36 includes a deflecting mechanism 38 for deflecting at least one flexible portion 46 of the rod seating mechanism 28 against and around the rod 16 as the locking mechanism 36 further engages the at least one flexible portion 46 of the rod seating mechanism 28. The deflecting mechanism 38 specifically engages and deflects the outer tapered surface end 34 therein.

[0037] The fixing mechanism 18 includes a substantially tubular body 40. As previously stated, the fixing mechanism 18 includes the gripping portion 22 and the non-gripping portion 24. It is this fixing mechanism 18 that is included in all of the various embodiments described herein. As previously described, the fixing mechanism 18, specifically the gripping portion 22, utilizes semi-flexible material that creates compression forces on the screw head 14 that is engaged with the gripping portion 22 when the gripping portion 22 is stretched beyond its original dimensions and returns to its original dimensions. The gripping portion 22 is a portion of the substantially tubular body 40 that grips and secures the screw head 14 once the screw 12 is inserted into the gripping portion 22. The gripping portion 22 grips and secures the screw head 14 by the spring reaction of the material composing the fixing mechanism 18. Thus, the screw head 14 of the screw 12 extends the inner surface wall 20 within its elastic range so that it is not permanently deformed. As a result of the elasticity of the material of the inner surface wall 20, the spring reaction of the material creates enough force upon the screw head 14 to securely fix the screw head 14 and ultimately the screw 12 in place.

[0038] As for the non-gripping portion 24, the screw 12 and the screw head 14 do not extend the inner surface wall 20 therein. Instead, the screw 12 and screw head 14 are freely moveable within the area surrounded by

the non-gripping portion 24 of the inner surface wall 20 of the fixing mechanism 18. The gripping portion 22 and non-gripping portion 24 of the inner surface wall 20 can be made of the same material or different materials depending upon the design. For instance, the gripping portion 22 can have an added coating or material in order to provide for added strength and/or flexibility. Preferably, the entire fixing mechanism 18 is made from semi-flexible material, especially at the gripping portion 22 end. Of course, the non-gripping portion 24 can also be made of a semi-flexible material. The semi-flexible material includes, but is not limited to, metal, plastics, alloys, polymers, fibers, combinations thereof, and any other similar materials that have a desired elasticity and elastic range. Thus, the locking of the screw head 14 requires no other manipulation of the fixing mechanism than the screw head 14 entering the gripping portion 22 of the substantially tubular body 40.

[0039] The substantially tubular body 40 of the fixing mechanism 18 can have various designs. Although a substantially tubular body 40 is utilized with the present invention, any other similar body shapes known to those of skill in the art can be utilized with the present invention. The substantially tubular body 40 also varies in overall dimensions depending upon the desired use thereof. Further, the substantially tubular body 40 can be segmented so portions of the substantially tubular body 40 can be snapped off. Further, the substantially tubular body 40 can be threaded or smooth. The threading can be on the exterior surface or on the interior surface thereof. The threading is useful when the fixing mechanism 18 is used in conjunction with a similarly threaded locking mechanism 36 as is described in more detail below.

[0040] An example of the fixing mechanism 18 is illustrated in Figures 1A and 1B. In this embodiment, the fixing mechanism 18 utilizes a relatively thin-walled, substantially tubular body 40. The substantially tubular body 40 has an outer diameter and an inner diameter such that a portion of the inner diameter is smaller in diameter of the screw head 14 (i.e., gripping portion 22 of the inner surface wall 20). When the screw head 14 is pushed downward into the substantially tubular body 40, the screw head 14 forces the smaller inner diameter to expand, but to remain within its elastic range. With the inner surface wall 20 remaining elastic, the spring reaction of the inner surface wall 20 at the gripping portion 22 creates considerable compression force as the inner surface wall 20 naturally returns from a deformed state to its original state. This spring reaction or force is equivalent to a mechanical variant of a pressure vessel creating a hoop stress in the inner surface wall 20. As long as this stress remains within the elastic range of the material of the inner surface wall 20, the load or force upon the screw head 14 remains constant. In addition, the force exerted on the screw head 14 is directly related to the ability of the gripping portion 22 of the inner surface wall 20 to resist deflection or expansion in this case. Thus, the thicker the inner surface wall 20 at the gripping portion 22,

the more spring reaction and compression forces are generated and applied to the screw head 14. Of course, the further the screw head 14 has to be pushed into the smaller diameter area (gripping portion 22) and the thicker the inner surface wall 20 therein, the more force is required to drive the screw head 14 further into the small diameter area (gripping portion 22).

[0041] To one skilled in the art, there are various ways to narrow the inner diameter of the fixing mechanism 18. One method is to reduce the inner diameter by simple boring techniques (Figures 1A and 1B). Additionally, various molds can be created to form the same design.

[0042] In another embodiment of a fixing mechanism 18', the inner surface wall is interiorly tapered therein and the interior surface wall 20' is also threaded 25. (Figure 2). As is shown in Figure 2, the fixing mechanism 18' is a substantially tubular body 40 or single-walled vessel. The fixing mechanism 18', more particularly the gripping portion 22', is made of the semi-flexible material described above. The gripping portion 22', due to the semi-flexible material, creates enough compression force onto the screw head 14 to fix it therein when the gripping portion 22' is stretched beyond its original dimensions by the screw head 14. The gripping portion 22' has a spring reaction when it returns to its original dimensions after being temporarily deformed by the screw head 14 after the screw head enters the interior portion of the gripping portion 22' therein.

[0043] The interior of the gripping portion 22' of the fixing mechanism 18' is spherically shaped 23 therein. Thus, as the locking mechanism 36 is inserted within the fixing mechanism 18', the screw head 14 engages the spherically shaped gripping portion 22' therein. The more the screw head 14 is pushed therein, the more interference is generated, which is compensated for by the expansion of the tubular structure to create the compressive force onto the screw head 14 (e.g., spring reaction). In this embodiment, the fixing mechanism 18' includes a pair of spaced, substantially parallel arms 42 extending from the substantially tubular body 40'. These arms 42, as is shown in Figure 2, can be optionally snapped-off from the substantially tubular body 40' after assembly of the screw fixation assembly 10' is completed.

[0044] In Figure 3, another embodiment of the fixing mechanism 18" is illustrated therein. This embodiment is similar to the embodiment illustrated in Figure 2; however, this embodiment of the fixing mechanism 18" has a threaded exterior surface 27 as opposed to a threaded interior surface 25. Again, the fixing mechanism 18", and more particularly the gripping portion 22", is made of the previously described semi-flexible material wherein the gripping portion 22" creates compression forces on the screw head 14 when the gripping portion 22" returns to its original dimensions after being stretched by the screw head 14 inserted therein. The embodiment of the fixing mechanism 18" illustrated in Figure 3 uses a different locking mechanism 36" that is similar to a nut or other device. The embodiment of the fixing mechanism 18" in

Figure 3 also includes a pair of spaced, substantially parallel arms 42' extending from the substantially tubular body 40" therefrom.

[0045] In yet another embodiment of the fixing mechanism 18''' (Figure 4), metal or metal and composite material (e.g., polymers) are utilized. The composite material can be blended with the metal or be used as an outer coating shell. The composite material is still semi-flexible so that compression forces are generated when the gripping portion 22''' is stretched, but returns to its original dimensions. Further, the gripping portion 22''' of the fixing mechanism 18''' illustrated therein uses a minimal amount of material to minimize x-ray obstruction while still providing sufficient spring reaction in order to secure the screw head therein. The screw head 14 used with this particular fixing mechanism 18''' is spherically shaped.

[0046] Figure 5 illustrates another embodiment of the fixing mechanism 18'''' such that a composite material is used. The fixing mechanism 18'''' includes a composite/polymer outer shell having an inner metallic component to form a hybrid load sharing structure. Again, the fixing mechanism 18'''' and more particularly the gripping portion 22'''', utilizes semi-flexible material so that sufficient compression forces are generated on the screw head 14 when the gripping portion 22'''' returns to its original dimensions after being stretched by the screw head 14 inserted therein. The fixing mechanism 18'''', as is shown in Figure 5, is basically a passageway or single-walled vessel that can accommodate the screw head 14 therein.

[0047] In Figure 15, another embodiment of the fixing mechanism 18''''' is shown. The fixing mechanism 18''''' is composed of a polymer that is semi-flexible. The fixing mechanism 18''''' includes a substantially tubular body 40''''' with a metallic ring at the screw head 14 location. As previously described, the semi-flexible fixing mechanism 18'''', and more specifically the gripping portion 22'''', generates compression forces onto the screw head 14 when the gripping portion 22'''' returns to its original dimensions after being stretched by the screw head 14. The fixing mechanism 18''''' further includes a spherical screw seat 23. The spherical screw seat 23 generally is machined into the substantially tubular body 40''''' therein. The spherical screw seat 23 allows deflection and grip. This embodiment is very useful in cases where the substantially tubular body 40''''' is not strong enough to provide ample spring reaction or force on the screw head 14 or enough frictional holding force. This is an example of a load sharing composite structure.

[0048] Optionally, the screw and rod fixation assembly 10 further can include a substantially annular ring 26 having an edge portion 30 extending about a centered axis. The annular ring 26 operates in conjunction with the fixing mechanism 18 that includes a substantially tubular body 40 forming a passageway or vessel described herein. While the fixing mechanism 18 does create sufficient compression forces due to the spring reaction of the material composing the fixing mechanism 18 and more spe-

cifically the gripping portion 22 (the spring reaction generates compression forces when the gripping portion is returning to its original dimensions after being stretched), there are times when additional frictional and/or mechanical forces are required.

[0049] The edge portion 30 of the annular ring 26 has a frustoconical surface tapering outwardly toward the edge portion 30 for engaging a screw head 14, while allowing a portion of the screw 12 to pass therethrough. The substantially annular ring 26 guides the screw head 14 and provides additional mechanical and frictional forces onto the screw head 14. The screw and rod fixation assembly 10 requires both mechanical and frictional locking. Holding the rod 16 requires mostly frictional locking, while securing the screw head 14 requires both mechanical and frictional locking. The various material utilized to compose the fixing mechanism 18 cannot necessarily provide sufficient mechanical and frictional locking force. Thus, by using a smaller, substantially annular ring 26 within the fixing mechanism 18, sufficient mechanical and frictional locking force can be provided therein. The locking can be shared by the metallic portion of the substantially annular ring 26, while the polymer/fiber reinforced portion creates a stronger interface. The use of the substantially annular ring 26 is optional. Thus, the screw and rod fixation assembly 10 can include it. Alternatively, an embodiment of the screw and rod fixation assembly 10 can exclude it so that the screw and rod fixation assembly 10 includes only a screw 14, a fixing mechanism 18, a rod seating mechanism 28, and a locking mechanism 36.

[0050] A rod seating mechanism 28 is operatively engaged with the fixing mechanism 18. The rod seating mechanism 28 further includes at least one flexible portion 46 capable of being compressed against the rod 16 seated within the rod seating mechanism 28. The flexible portion 46 has a tapered outer surface end 34. The rod seating mechanism 28 has a body portion 44. In the embodiments shown in Figures 7, 10-14, and 16, there are two flexible portions or arms 46 that are substantially parallel to each other. In those situations, the two flexible portions 46 and body portion 44 form a substantially U-shaped inner wall 32 defining the first seat 30 therein. Further, the flexible portions 46 include a tapered outer surface end 34.

[0051] The at least one flexible portion 46 of the rod seating mechanism 28 securely engages the rod 16 therein by contouring around the outer circumference or surface of the rod 16. The rod seating mechanism 28 is altered to allow the deflectable flexible portions 46 to engage the rod 16 as the locking mechanism 36 is tightened thereon. (Figures 7 and 8). Thus, as the locking mechanism 36, as illustrated in Figure 9, is advanced within the fixing mechanism 18, the flexible portions are pushed over the top of the rod 16 thereby increasing contact area of the flexible portions 46 over the rod 16 and further increasing frictional force thereon. (Figures 12A and 12B). Figure 12A illustrates the rod seating mechanism 28 wherein the rod 16 is seated therein and the flexible

portions 46 are extended above the rod 16. Figure 12B illustrates the rod seating mechanism 28 having the flexible portions 46 being compressed against and around the rod 16 as the result of the locking mechanism 36 being tightened around the flexible portions 46. The flexible portions 46 are deflected inward by the locking mechanism 36 in order to compress the flexible portions 46 around and against the rod 16. In Figures 12A and 12B, the locking mechanism 36 is not shown in order to clarify and further illustrate the bending of the flexible portions 46.

[0052] As previously mentioned, it is possible to add a substantially annular ring 26 or internal sleeve 26 to enhance grip or act as a spacer between the fixing mechanism 18 and screw head 14 therein. When grip is enhanced, a material having a softer or different composition than the outer surface wall 21 of the substantially tubular body 40 can be placed on the inner surface wall 20 for the screw head 14 to compress against rather than directly against the outer surface wall 21. For example, a soft, commercial pure substantially annular ring 26 or sleeve 26 is inside a stronger body of Ti-6Al-4V. In this case, the outer surface 21 acts as a tubular spring, but the softer inside, which would be potentially too weak to allow the spring reaction, would allow the screw head 14 to bite into the softer material for enhanced screw locking. (Figures 13 and 14). In addition, for manufacturing, it can be advantageous to overbore the inside of the substantially tubular body 40 and add a substantially annular ring 26 or sleeve 26. Such a sleeve 26 can be a thin, solid wall or a split wall having a gap 29 as shown in Figures 13 and 14 respectively. The split or gap 29 allows the sleeve 26 to flex without interfering with the outer surface 21 of the substantially tubular body 40. The sleeve 26 can be pressed fit or have some clearance for easier assembly. A semi-flexible polymer or composite material can be used for the substantially tubular body 40 and a different material such as titanium can be used for the sleeve 26 to provide for either additional reinforcement, better screw 12 locking, and/or improved rod 16 engagement.

[0053] With regard to the locking mechanism 36, the locking mechanism 36 engages a rod 16 and rod receiving mechanism 28. The locking mechanism works in conjunction with the fixing mechanism 18 wherein the fixing mechanism 18 is typically a substantially tubular body 40 that can accommodate the locking mechanism 36 therein. Again, the fixing mechanism 18 is basically a passageway or single-walled vessel made of semi-flexible material. The fixing mechanism 18, through the gripping portion 22, places compression forces onto the screw head 14 as a result of the spring reaction created when the gripping portion 22 returns to its original dimensions after being stretched within its elastic range by the screw head 14 inserted therein. The locking mechanism 36 secures and tightens the entire screw and rod fixation assembly 10. The locking mechanism 36 includes a deflecting mechanism 38 for deflecting at least one flexible por-

tion 46 of the rod seating mechanism 28 against and around the rod 16 as said locking mechanism 36 further engages the at least one flexible portion 46 of the rod seating mechanism 28. The deflecting mechanism 38 can be an inner surface or portion of the locking mechanism 36 itself. The deflecting mechanism 38 further engages the tapered outer surface 34 therein.

[0054] The locking mechanism 36 can be a nut, screw, set screw, or other similar locking mechanism 36 as is known to those skilled in the art. The locking mechanism 36 usually is threaded on at least one surface thereon. Figures 9, 14, 10, 11, 13, 14, and 19 through 23 illustrate embodiments of locking mechanisms 36, 36". As stated, the locking mechanism 36 is preferably a set screw including a threaded outer surface 48 for operatively engaging an inner threaded surface 25 of the fixing mechanism 18. Alternatively, the locking mechanism 36 can be a locking nut including a threaded inner surface 50 for operatively engaging an outer threaded surface 27 of the fixing mechanism 18 as disclosed herein.

[0055] The locking mechanism 36 can further include a spherical, inner chamber 39 for accommodating at least one flexible portion 46 of the rod seating mechanism 28 when the at least one flexible portion 46 is contoured around the rod 16 situated therein. The spherical, inner chamber 39 can also be useful in accommodating any type of instrument.

[0056] Alternatively, the locking mechanism 36" can include a non-threaded exterior surface 60. The locking mechanism 36" includes a body 61 having a top portion 62 and a bottom portion 64. Preferably, both the top portion 62 and the bottom portion 64 have radially, unthreaded exterior surfaces 60. The locking mechanism 36" can also include an engagement portion 76 for engaging the fixing mechanism 18 of the assembly 10. The engagement portion 76 ensures that the locking mechanism 36" maintains proper positioning within the assembly 10 and is fixed relative thereto. The engagement portion 76 can be a groove 78 that mates with a tab 80 on fixing mechanism 18. The fixing mechanism 18 is preferably formed of a flexible material such that it allows radially extending frustoconical movement, thereby enabling easier insertion of the locking mechanism 36'. Alternatively, the engagement portion 76 can be a tab 82 on the engagement portion 76 that mates with a groove 84 located within the fixing mechanism 18. In either instance, the tab 80, 82 is any form of protrusion that can be maintained within a groove 78, 84 via an interference fit. For example, the tab can be a circumferential tab on the exterior surface 60 of the locking mechanism 36" or a cam 36'''.

[0057] The locking mechanism 36" also includes a spring loading device 66 located at the base 68 of the bottom portion 64. The spring loading device 66 is used to provide a biasing force between the locking mechanism 36 and the rod 16 in order to fixedly secure the rod 16 within the assembly 10. The spring loading device 66 can be any device known to those of skill in the art as being able to provide a biasing force between the two

parts. Examples of such devices include, but are not limited to, a Belleville washer, a spherical washer, a fixed spring loading device, or other similar devices. The washers 66' can be of any size sufficient to provide the biasing force disclosed above. For example, the washer can be spherical or conical. The washer 66' can be solid or can include a central aperture that can be of any shape known to be effective to those of skill in the art such as, but not limited to, round or square. The washer 66' can be of any thickness as necessary for the use of the locking mechanism 36" such that the thickness of the washer 66' is directly related to the spring rate necessary to provide the desired biasing force for locking the assembly together. The washer 66' can be formed with a solid thickness or the thickness can vary from the outer edge of the washer to the inner section of the washer.

[0058] The washer 66' is seated in the base 68 of the bottom portion 64 of the body 61. The washer 66' is positioned within a slot 90 within the base 68. The slot 90 is sized to maintain the washer 66' in position such that the washer 66' includes a concave portion 92 or is completely concave. The extent to which the washer 66' is concavely shaped depends upon the use of the locking mechanism 36". The concave portion 92 of the washer 66' engages the rod 16, thus creating a biasing force.

[0059] Alternatively, the spring loading device 66 can be fixed. In other words, the fixed spring loading device 66' is machined directly into the base 68 of the bottom portion 64 of the locking mechanism 36".

[0060] The fixed spring loading device 66' functions in the same manner as the washer described above, however the fixed spring loading device 66' is one with the base 68. The fixed spring loading device 66' can be shaped as required for the locking mechanism 36" into which it is machined. Examples of potential shapes for the fixed spring loading device 66' include, but are not limited to, spherical, conical, rectangular, and cylindrical. As with the washer, the fixed spring loading device 66' can be formed to any thickness so as to provide the desired biasing force for locking the assembly together. Additionally, the thickness of the fixed spring loading device 66' can be constant or can vary.

[0061] Further, the locking mechanism 36" can include an aperture 70 on a peak 72 of the top portion 62 of the locking mechanism 36". The aperture 70 can be used for the insertion and removal of the locking mechanism 36". The aperture 70 can include threads 74 or other mechanisms that are beneficial for inserting and removing the locking mechanism 36". Alternatively, the aperture 70 can be shaped such that a specific tool can be used for inserting and removing the locking mechanism 36".

[0062] The locking mechanism 36' can include a variety of tabs 82 as disclosed above. For example, the tab 82' can be a cam lock 82' as shown in Figures 22 and 23. Preferably, the tab 82' is a partial circumferential tab that engages a partial groove 84' such that when the tab 82' is rotated or twisted into place within the groove 84', an axial force is generated that holds the entire assembly

10 together. The configuration of the tab 82' can include an inclined plane or ramp configuration, or a bayonet configuration. The cam lock 82' can include an aperture 70' on a top 72' of the top portion 62' of the locking mechanism 36". The aperture 70' can be used for the insertion and removal of the locking mechanism 36". The aperture 70' can include threads 74' or other mechanisms that are beneficial for inserting and removing the locking mechanism 36". Alternatively, the aperture 70' can be shaped such that a specific tool can be used for inserting and removing the locking mechanism 36".

[0063] The locking mechanism 36" can be a tapered locking cap 86 as shown in Figures 20 and 21. The tapered locking cap 86 is preferably a self-locking taper that fits a mating taper 88 on the exterior surface 88 of the fixing mechanism 18. In other words, the exterior surface 88 of the fixing means 18 is tapered as is the tapered locking cap 86 such that the two pieces mate and lock together to maintain the assembly 10 in proper alignment. The tapered locking cap 86 can also include an engagement portion 76". The engagement portion 76" is a device then ensures that the tapered locking cap 86, and thus the locking mechanism 36", maintains proper positioning within the assembly 10. The engagement portion 76" can be a groove 78" that mates with a tab 80" on fixing mechanism 18. Alternatively, the engagement portion 76" can be a tab 82" on the engagement portion 76" that mates with a groove 84" located within the fixing mechanism 18. In either instance, the tab 80", 82" is any form of protrusion that can be maintained within a groove 78", 84" via an interference fit. For example, the tab 80", 82" can be a circumferential tab on the exterior surface 60" of the locking mechanism 36". The tapered locking cap 86 can include an aperture 70" on a top 72" of the top portion 62" of the locking mechanism 36". The aperture 70" can be used for the insertion and removal of the locking mechanism 36". The aperture 70" can include threads 74" or other mechanisms that are beneficial for inserting and removing the locking mechanism 36". Alternatively, the aperture 70" can be shaped such that a specific tool can be used for inserting and removing the locking mechanism 36".

[0064] In other variations, a locking mechanism 36 is not included; instead, a different type of rod seating mechanism 28"" can be used. In this particular embodiment, the rod seating mechanism 28"" is inserted directly into the fixing mechanism 18"". The rod seating mechanism 28"" operatively engages the fixing mechanism 18"". Again, the fixing mechanism 18"" is made of semi-flexible material that generates compression forces that are applied to the screw head 14 when the fixing mechanism 18 (more specifically the gripping portion 22"") returns to its original dimensions after being stretched within its elastic range by the screw head 14 inserted therein.

[0065] The rod seating mechanism 28"" includes the same structural components of the rod seating mechanism 28 described above. The rod seating mechanism

28"" includes at least one flexible portion 46"" having a tapered outer surface 34"" with at least one tab mechanism 31 radially extending from the tapered outer surface 34"" for operatively engaging and inserting into at least one indentation 33 or aperture 35 situated on the inner surface wall 24"" of the substantially tubular body 40"" of the fixing mechanism 18"". The size, shape, and dimensions of the tab mechanism 31 varies according to a desired size of the overall structure of the rod receiving mechanism 28"". Likewise, the indentation 33 or aperture 35 extending through the inner surface wall 24"" varies according to design. (Figure 16)

[0066] As the rod seating mechanism 28"" is inserted into the fixing mechanism 18"" and over the screw head 14, the flexible portions 46"" of the rod seating mechanism 28"" contour around and compress the inserted rod 16 situated therein due to the deflection of the tab mechanisms 31 caused by interference created by the inner surface wall 24"" of the fixing mechanism 18"". Once the tab mechanisms 31 engage with either the indentation 33 or the aperture 35, the flexible portions 46"" of the rod seating mechanism 28"" remain locked in a compressed condition contoured around the rod 16. In order to release the rod seating mechanism 26"" from the compressed condition, an instrument merely needs to be inserted between the rod seating mechanism 26"" and the fixing mechanism 18"".

[0067] In yet another variation, the rod seating mechanism 28 is eliminated and replaced by a different embodiment of the locking mechanism 36"" wherein the locking mechanism 36"" is a plug securing mechanism 52 (Figure 17) that is inserted into the screw and rod fixation assembly 10 and onto the rod 16 after the rod 16 is introduced into the fixing mechanism 18"". As with the other embodiments, the fixing mechanism 18"" is made of semi-flexible material. Again, due to the semi-flexible material, the fixing mechanism 18"", and particularly the gripping portion 22"", generates compression forces that are applied to the screw head 14 once the gripping portion 22"" returns to its original dimensions after being stretched within its elastic range.

[0068] The plug securing mechanism 52 can be any screw type device such as a set screw 36"". The plug securing mechanism 52 contacts at least a portion or part of the rod 16 in order to securely fix the rod 16 situated therein and the entire screw and rod fixation assembly 10"". The plug securing mechanism 52 is substantially cylindrical in shape and is capable of insertion into the substantially tubular body 40 of the fixing mechanism 18"". The plug securing mechanism 52 also includes at least one outwardly tapered extending tab mechanism 55 for locking the plug securing mechanism 53 onto the rod 16. The extending tab mechanism 55 operatively engages at least one indentation 33' or aperture 35' situated within the inner surface wall 20"" of the substantially tubular body 40"" of the fixing mechanism 18"". The size, shape, and dimensions of the extending tab mechanism 55 vary according to a desired size of the overall

structure of the fixing mechanism 18'''''. Likewise, the indentation 33' on the inner surface wall 20'''''' or the aperture 35' extending therethrough the inner surface wall 20'''''' varies accordingly. (Figure 17)

[0069] As the plug securing mechanism 52 is inserted into the fixing mechanism 18'''''' and over the rod 16, the plug securing mechanism 52 compresses against the inserted rod 16 situated within the first seat 30'''''. Then, when the extending tab mechanisms 55 engage with either the indentation 33' or the aperture 35', the plug securing mechanism 52 remains locked in a compressed condition onto the rod 16.

[0070] Optionally, the plug securing mechanism 52 further includes a threaded inner surface 53 for operatively engaging any type of additional screw 12 for further tightening of the rod 16. Thus, a screw 12 can be inserted and screwed into the plug mechanism 52. Alternatively, the outer surface 57 of the plug securing mechanism 52 can be threaded for engaging the threaded inner surface wall 20'''''' of the substantially tubular body 40'''''' of the fixing mechanism 18''''''.

[0071] The present invention is not limited for use with just a bone screw 12. For instance, the fixing mechanism 18'''''' can be extended to be used with other types of screws, mechanical parts, and/or structures. The fixing mechanism 18'''''' still utilizes, as with the other embodiments, semi-flexible material to create compression forces resulting from the spring reaction created when the fixing mechanism 18'''''' returns to its original dimensions after being stretched within its elastic range.

[0072] The other parts that can be used with the present invention include other implants, such as a swivel joint 58 for a cross-link connector that can be fixed with the present invention. (Figure 18). In this situation, a spherical head 54 is forced into a reduced diameter section 56 that exerts a force on the spherical head 54 to lock it securely. In Figure 18, the spherical head within the tube portion is shown and movement of the spherical head into the gripping portion 22 locks the entire assembly. The assembly 10'''''' as shown in Figure 18 can be further locked by the locking mechanism 36 as described herein. Additionally, an instrument can be utilized to simply lock the assembly 10. Simply pulling on the two components with ample force in opposite directions will lock the two components securely as the wall expands and exerts compressive forces on the head portion as illustrated therein in Figure 19.

[0073] The components for the screw fixation assembly and device disclosed and described herein can be manufactured by various methods known to those of skill in the art. For instance, the assembly and device can be made by first blanking the outer shape from a round bar stock. Then, by holding on the threaded end or an extension of the threaded end, a hole is made in the opposite end. This hole is undersized relative to the taper to allow the taper to be cut with a single tool. While the part turns in a lathe, a boring bar having a small cutting tip is introduced into the hole and the taper and recess cut. The

threads are then cut, any extension cut off, and the slot either milled or cut to be more compatible.

[0074] The various other components can be made by cutting the outside cylindrical shape with an extension to hold on in a lathe. A hole is drilled into one end and a boring bar with a small cutting tip is used to enter the hole and cut the spherical seat. The outer slots and hinge details are cut by either slitting away with a saw or a wire.

[0075] Throughout this application various publications are referenced by author and year. United States patents however, are referenced by number and inventor. Full citations for the publications are listed below. The disclosures of these publications and patents in their entireties are hereby incorporated by reference into this application to more fully describe the state of the art to which this invention pertains.

[0076] The invention has been described in an illustrative manner, and it is to be understood that the terminology that has been used is intended to be in the nature of words of description rather than of limitation.

[0077] Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. It is, therefore, to be understood that within the scope of the appended claims, the invention can be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.

Claims

1. A locking mechanism (36'') comprising non-threaded locking means (61) for locking a rod (16) in place within a screw and rod fixation assembly (10), said locking means further including spring loading means (66) for providing a biasing force between said locking mechanism (36'') and a rod (16) disposed within the screw and rod fixation assembly (10), **characterized in that** said spring loading means (66) is a washer (66') seated in a base (68) of said locking means (61).
2. The locking mechanism according to claim 1, wherein said locking means (61) includes engagement means (76) for engaging an aperture in the screw and rod fixation assembly (10).
3. The locking mechanism according to claim 2, wherein said engagement means (76) is selected from the group consisting essentially of a groove (78, 84), a tab (80, 82), and a snug fit.
4. The locking mechanism according to claim 1, wherein said washer (66') has a configuration selected from the group consisting essentially of spherical, conical, solid, and with a central aperture.
5. The locking mechanism according to claim 4, wherein said central aperture has a shape selected from the group consisting essentially of round and square.

6. The locking mechanism according to claim 1, wherein said spring loading means (66) is a single unit with said locking mechanism (36").
7. The locking mechanism according to claim 6, wherein said spring loading means (66) has a shape selected from the group consisting essentially of spherical, conical, rectangular, and cylindrical.
8. The locking mechanism according to claim 1, wherein said locking means (61) has an essentially tapered shape or a shape of a cam.
9. The locking mechanism according to claim 8, wherein said tapered locking means (61) includes an automatic locking taper (86) for mating with an outer surface (88) of a rod locking device of the screw and rod fixation assembly (10).
10. The locking mechanism according to claim 1, further comprising a cam locking means (76), wherein said cam locking means (76) includes a partial circumferential tab (80, 82) on an outer surface (60) of said cam locking means (61) for engaging a groove (78, 84) in the screw and rod fixation assembly.
11. The locking mechanism according to claim 1, further including an aperture (70) on a top side (72) of said locking means (61), said aperture (70) being used for inserting and extracting said locking means (61).
12. The locking mechanism according to claim 11, wherein said aperture (70) is internally threaded.

Patentansprüche

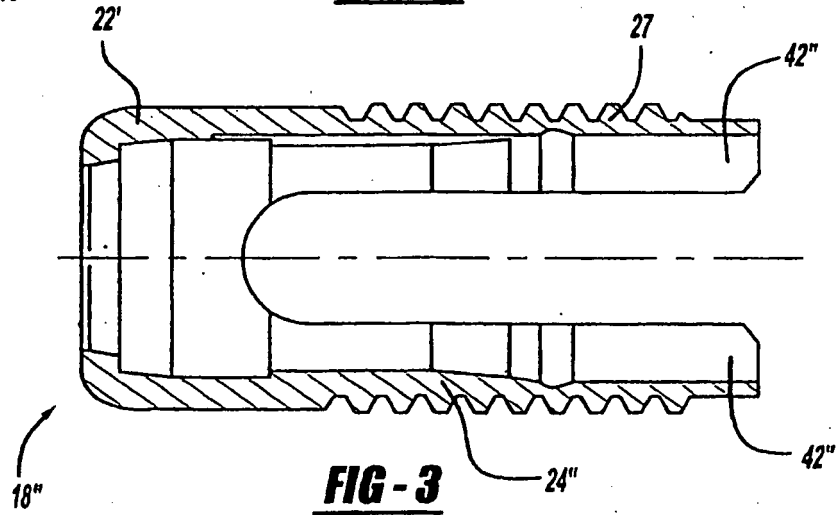
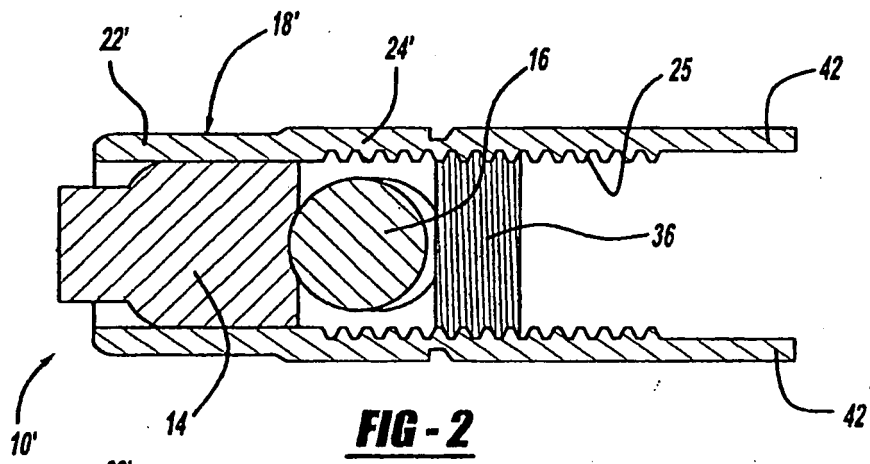
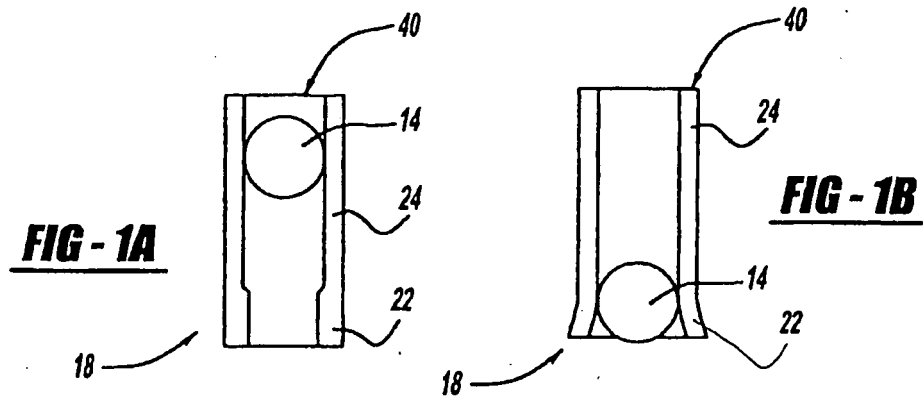
1. Verriegelungsmechanismus (36"), umfassend ein gewindefreies Verriegelungsmittel (61) zum An-Ort-und-Stelle-Verriegeln eines Stabs (16) innerhalb einer Schrauben-und-Stab-Fixationsanordnung (10), wobei das Verriegelungsmittel ferner Federbelastungsmittel (66) zum Bereitstellen einer Vorspannkraft zwischen dem Verriegelungsmechanismus (36") und einem innerhalb der Schrauben-und-Stab-Fixationsanordnung (10) angeordneten Stab (16) umfasst, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** das Federbelastungsmittel (66) eine Scheibe (66') ist, welche in einer Basis (68) des Verriegelungsmittels (61) sitzt.
2. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 1, wobei das Verriegelungsmittel (61) ein Eingriffsmittel (76) zum Eingriff mit einer Öffnung in der Schrauben-und-Stab-Fixationsanordnung (10) umfasst.
3. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 2, wobei das Eingriffsmittel (76) aus der Gruppe ausge-

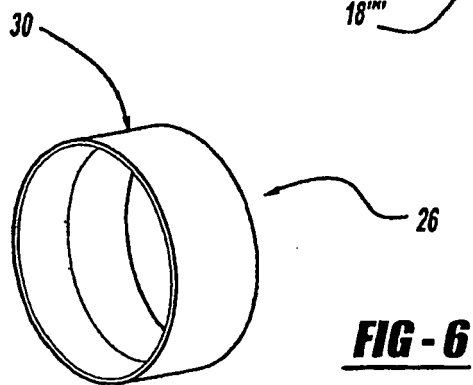
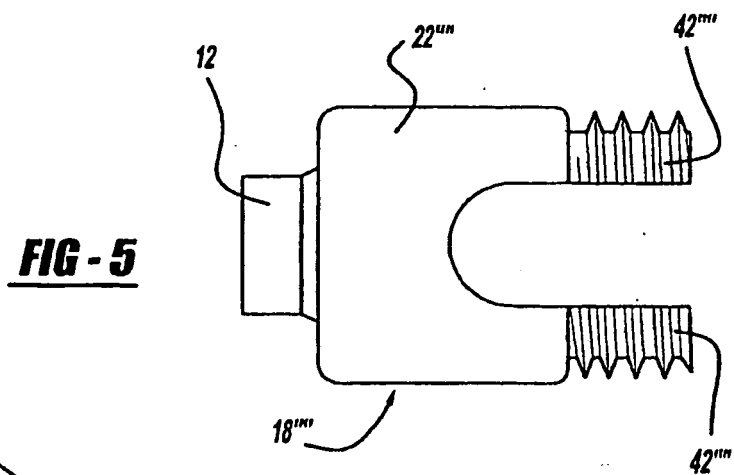
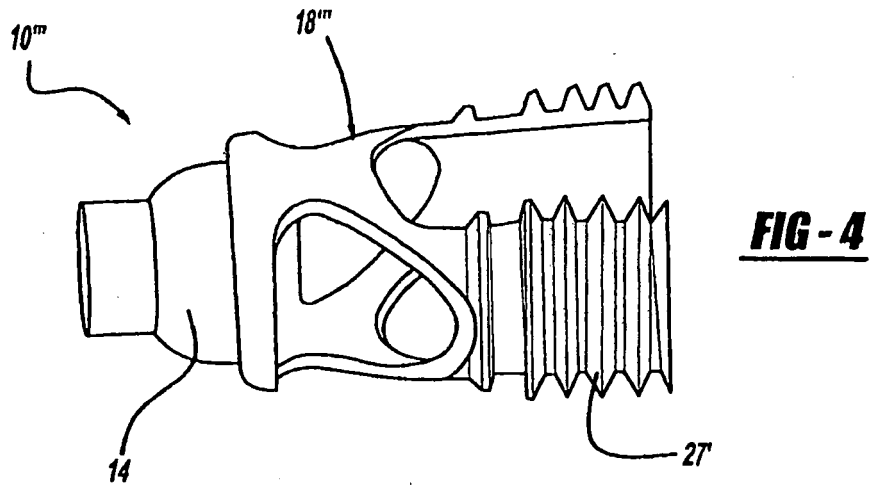
wählt ist, welche im Wesentlichen aus einer Nut (78, 84), einem Vorsprung (80, 82) und einer engen Passung besteht.

4. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 1, wobei die Scheibe (66') eine Konfiguration aufweist, die aus der Gruppe ausgewählt ist, welche im Wesentlichen besteht aus: sphärisch, konisch, massiv und mit einer zentralen Öffnung.
5. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 4, wobei die zentrale Öffnung eine Form aufweist, die aus der Gruppe ausgewählt ist, welche im Wesentlichen besteht aus: rund und quadratisch.
6. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 1, wobei das Federbelastungsmittel (66) eine einzige Einheit mit dem Verriegelungsmechanismus (36") bildet.
7. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 6, wobei das Federbelastungsmittel (66) eine Form aufweist, die aus der Gruppe ausgewählt ist, welche im Wesentlichen besteht aus: sphärisch, konisch, rechteckig und zylindrisch.
8. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 1, wobei das Verriegelungsmittel (61) eine im Wesentlichen verjüngte Form oder die Form einer Nocke aufweist.
9. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 8, wobei das verjüngte Verriegelungsmittel (61) eine Automatikverriegelungsverjüngung (86) zum Zusammenpassen mit einer äußeren Oberfläche (88) einer Stabverriegelungsvorrichtung der Schrauben-und-Stab-Fixationsanordnung (10) umfasst.
10. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 1, ferner umfassend ein Nockenverriegelungsmittel (76), wobei das Nockenverriegelungsmittel (76) einen teilmfänglichen Vorsprung (80, 82) an einer äußeren Oberfläche (60) des Nockenverriegelungsmittels (61) zum Eingriff mit einer Nut (78, 84) in der Schrauben-und-Stab-Fixationsanordnung (10) umfasst.
11. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 1, ferner umfassend eine Öffnung (70) an einer Oberseite (72) des Verriegelungsmittels (61), wobei die Öffnung (70) zum Einführen und Entnehmen des Verriegelungsmittels (61) verwendet wird.
12. Verriegelungsmechanismus nach Anspruch 11, wobei die Öffnung (70) mit einem Innengewinde versehen ist.

Revendications

1. Mécanisme de blocage (36") comprenant un moyen de blocage non fileté (61) pour bloquer en place une tige (16) dans un assemblage de fixation à vis et tige (10), ledit moyen de blocage comportant en outre un moyen à ressort (66) pour fournir une force de poussée entre ledit mécanisme de blocage (36") et une tige (16) disposée à l'intérieur de l'assemblage de fixation à vis et tige (10), **caractérisé en ce que** ledit moyen à ressort (66) est une rondelle (66') installée dans la base (68) dudit moyen de blocage (61). 5
2. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 1, dans lequel ledit moyen de blocage (61) comporte un moyen d'engagement (76) pour engager une ouverture dans l'assemblage de fixation à vis et tige (10). 10
3. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 2, dans lequel ledit moyen d'engagement (76) est choisi dans le groupe constitué essentiellement d'une gorge (78, 84), une patte (80, 82) et un ajustement serré. 15
4. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 1, dans lequel ladite rondelle (66') a une configuration choisie dans le groupe constitué essentiellement d'une configuration sphérique, conique, pleine et avec une ouverture centrale. 20
5. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 4, dans lequel ladite ouverture centrale a une forme choisie dans le groupe constitué essentiellement d'une forme ronde et carrée. 25
6. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 1, dans lequel ledit moyen à ressort (66) est un élément unique avec ledit mécanisme de blocage (36"). 30
7. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 6, dans lequel ledit moyen à ressort (66) a une forme choisie dans le groupe constitué essentiellement d'une forme sphérique, conique, rectangulaire et cylindrique. 35
8. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 1, dans lequel ledit moyen de blocage (61) a une forme essentiellement effilée ou la forme d'une came. 40
9. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 8, dans lequel ledit moyen de blocage effilé (61) comporte un cône de blocage automatique (86) destiné à s'accoupler avec la surface extérieure (88) d'un dispositif de blocage de tige de l'assemblage de fixation à vis et tige (10). 45
10. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 1, comprenant en outre un moyen de blocage à came (76), dans lequel ledit moyen de blocage à came (76) comporte une patte circonférentielle partielle (80, 82) sur la surface extérieure (60) dudit moyen de blocage à came (61) pour engager une gorge (78, 84) dans l'assemblage de fixation à vis et tige. 50
11. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 1, incluant en outre une ouverture (70) sur la face supérieure (72) dudit moyen de blocage (61), ladite ouverture (70) étant utilisée pour insérer et extraire ledit moyen de blocage (61). 55
12. Mécanisme de blocage selon la revendication 11, dans lequel ladite ouverture (70) est taraudée intérieurement.





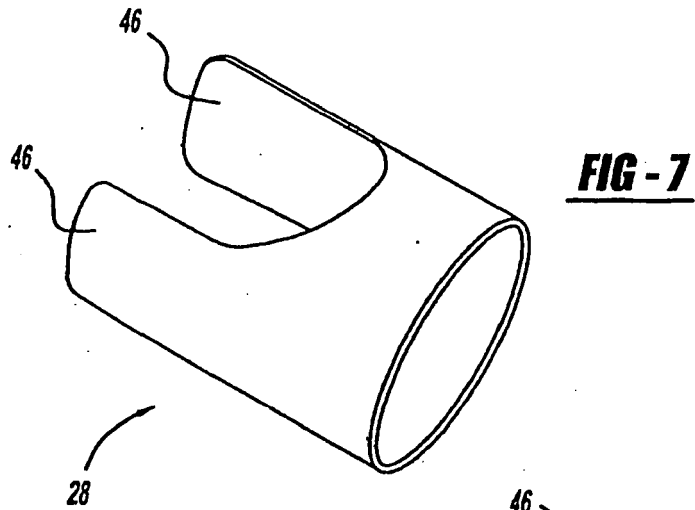
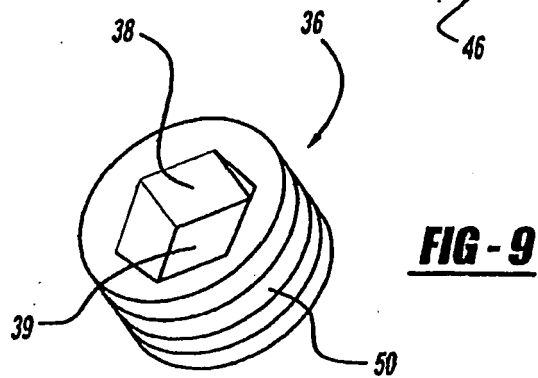
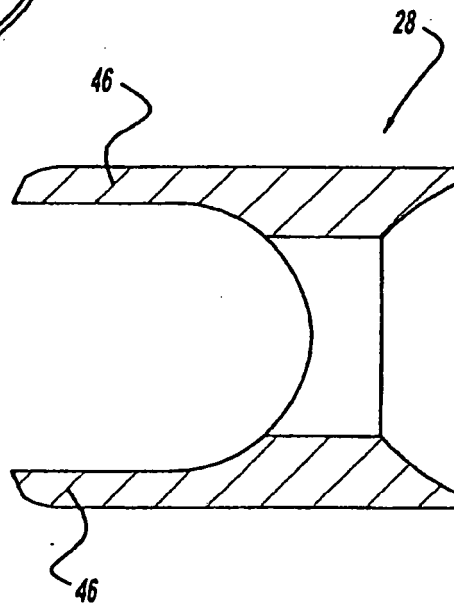
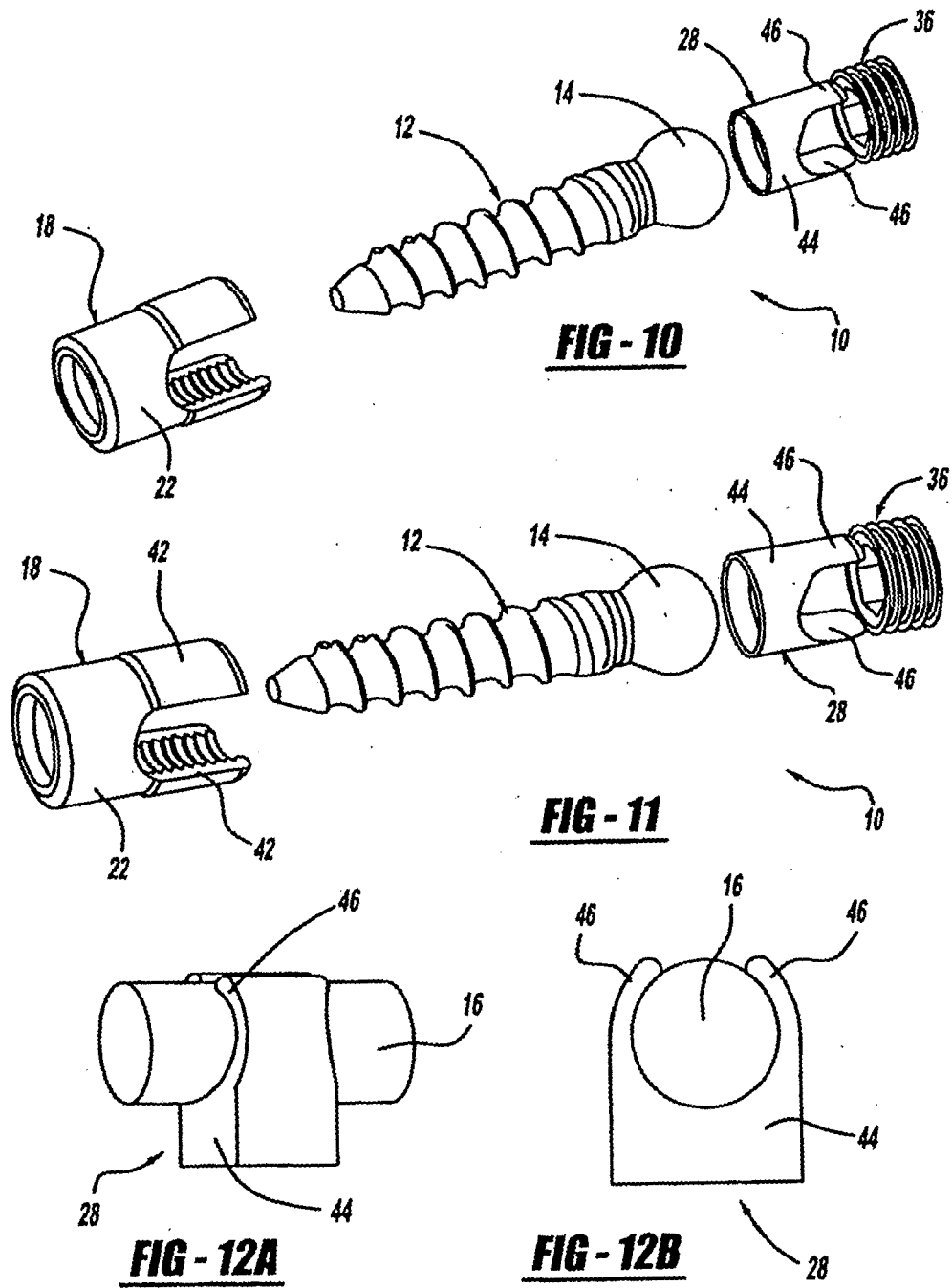
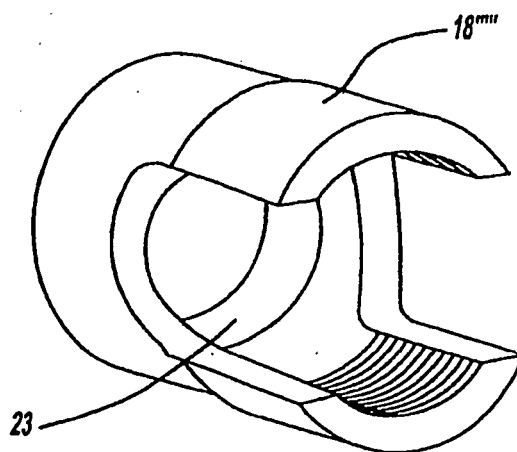
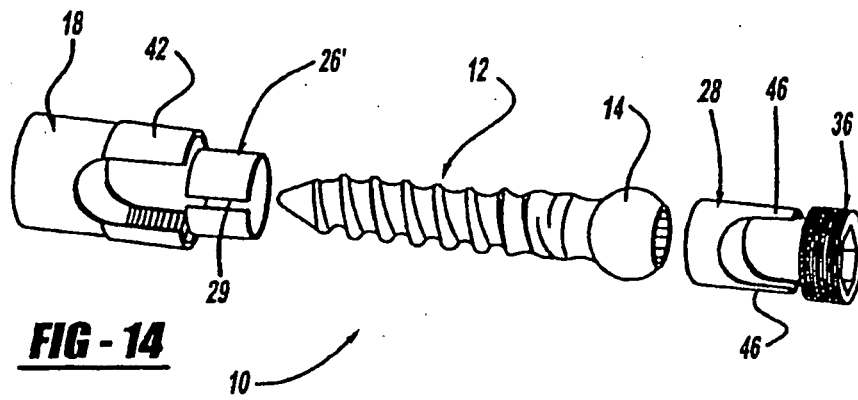
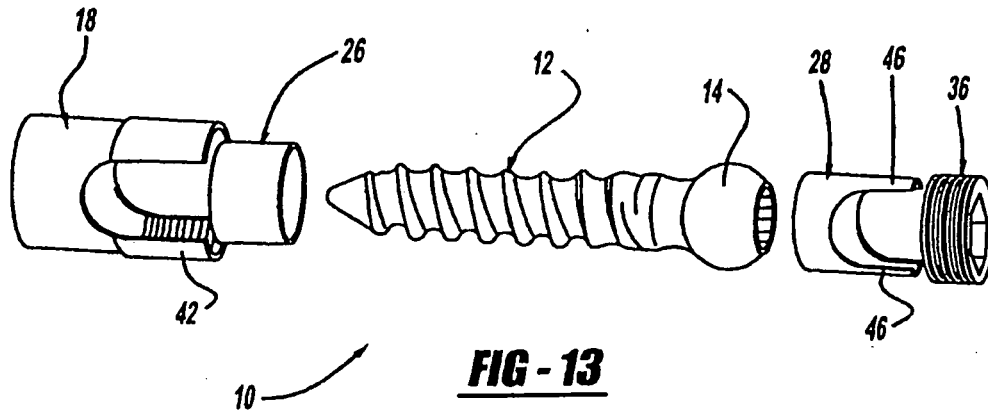
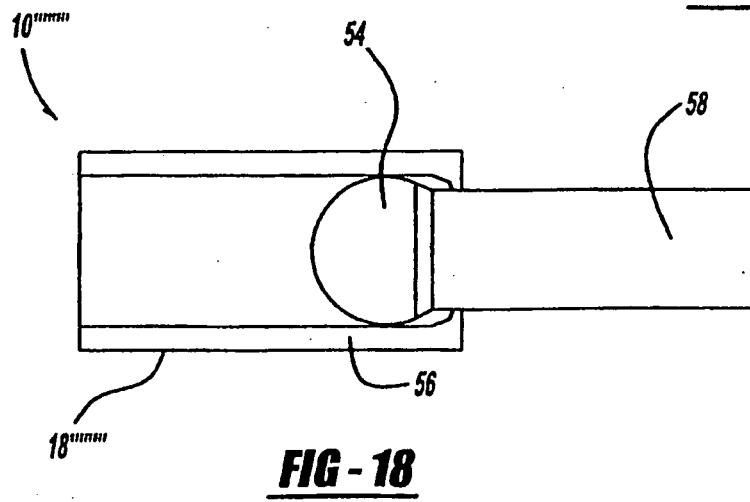
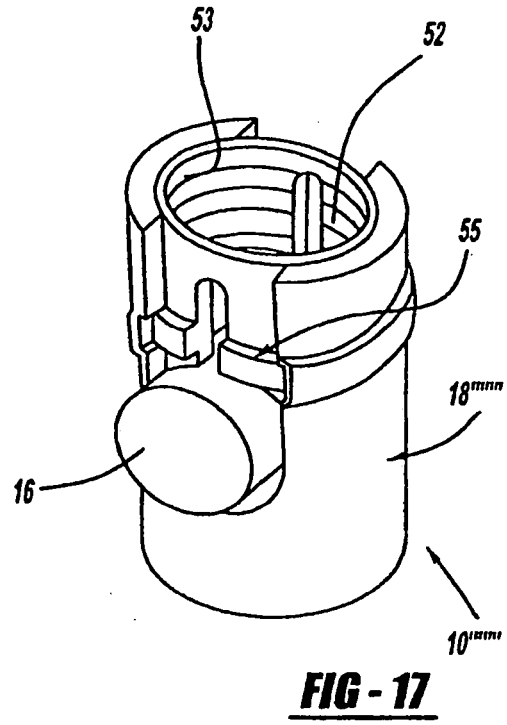
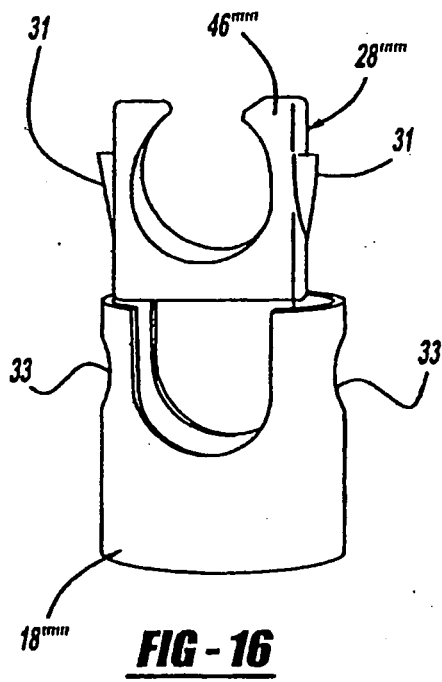


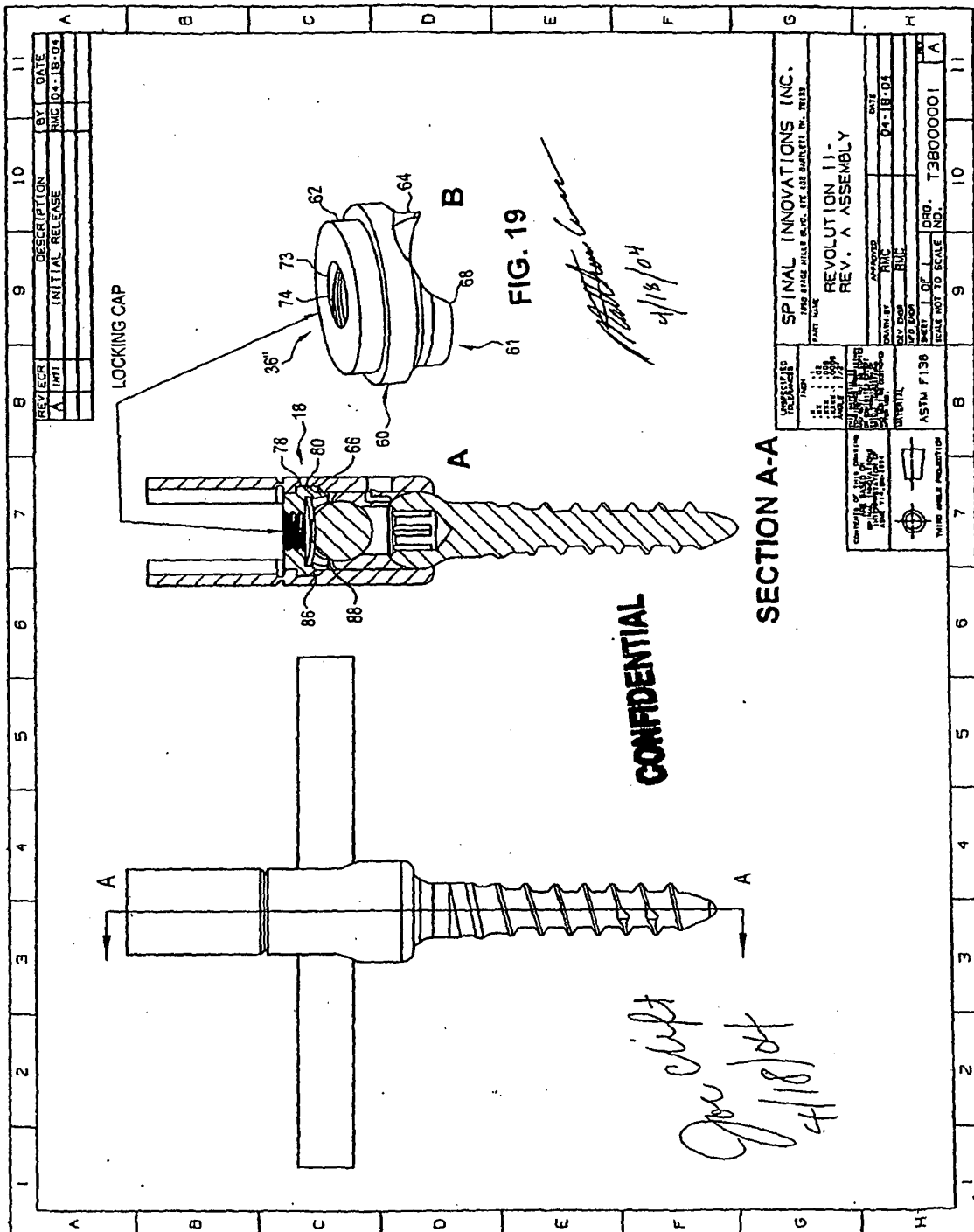
FIG - 8

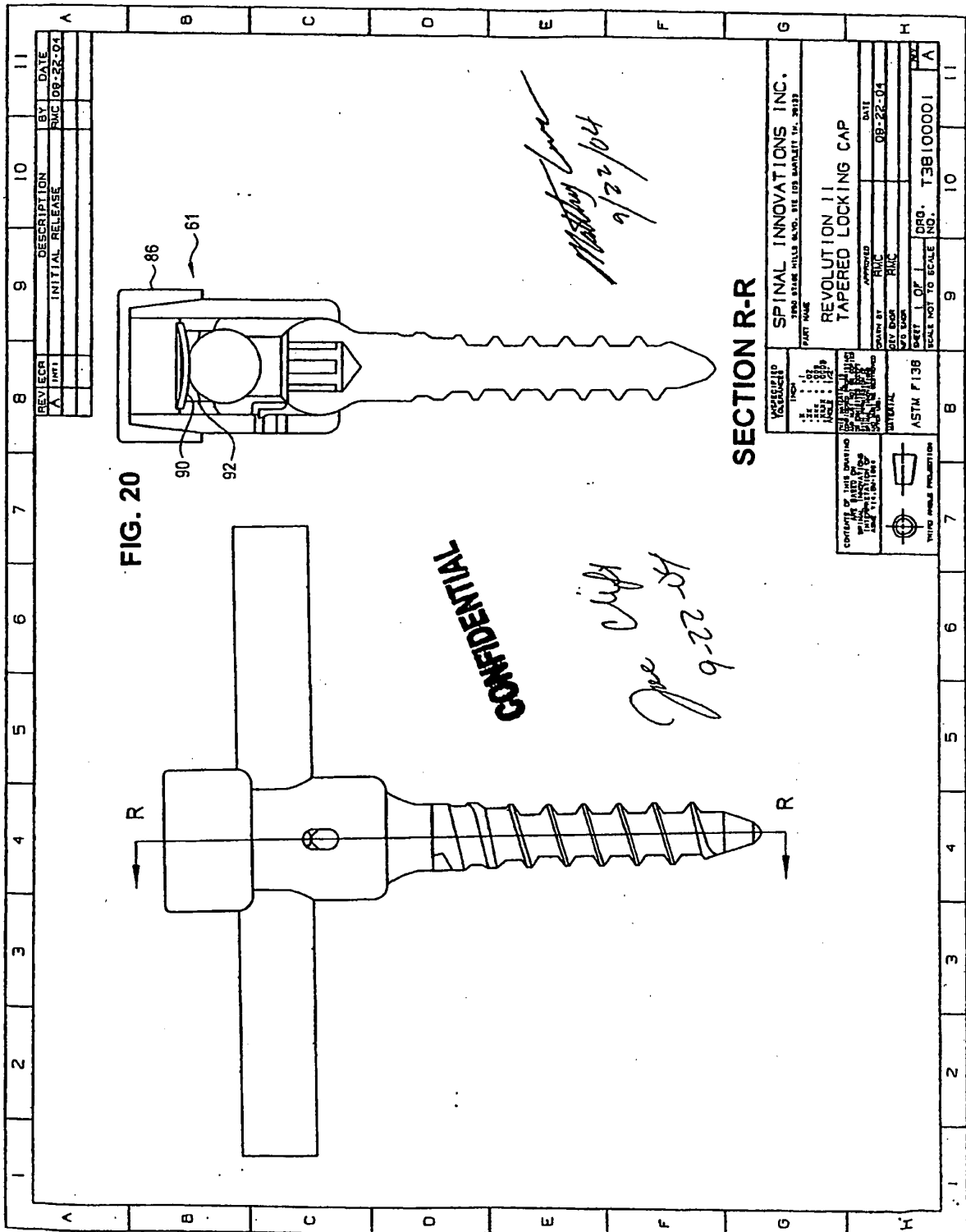


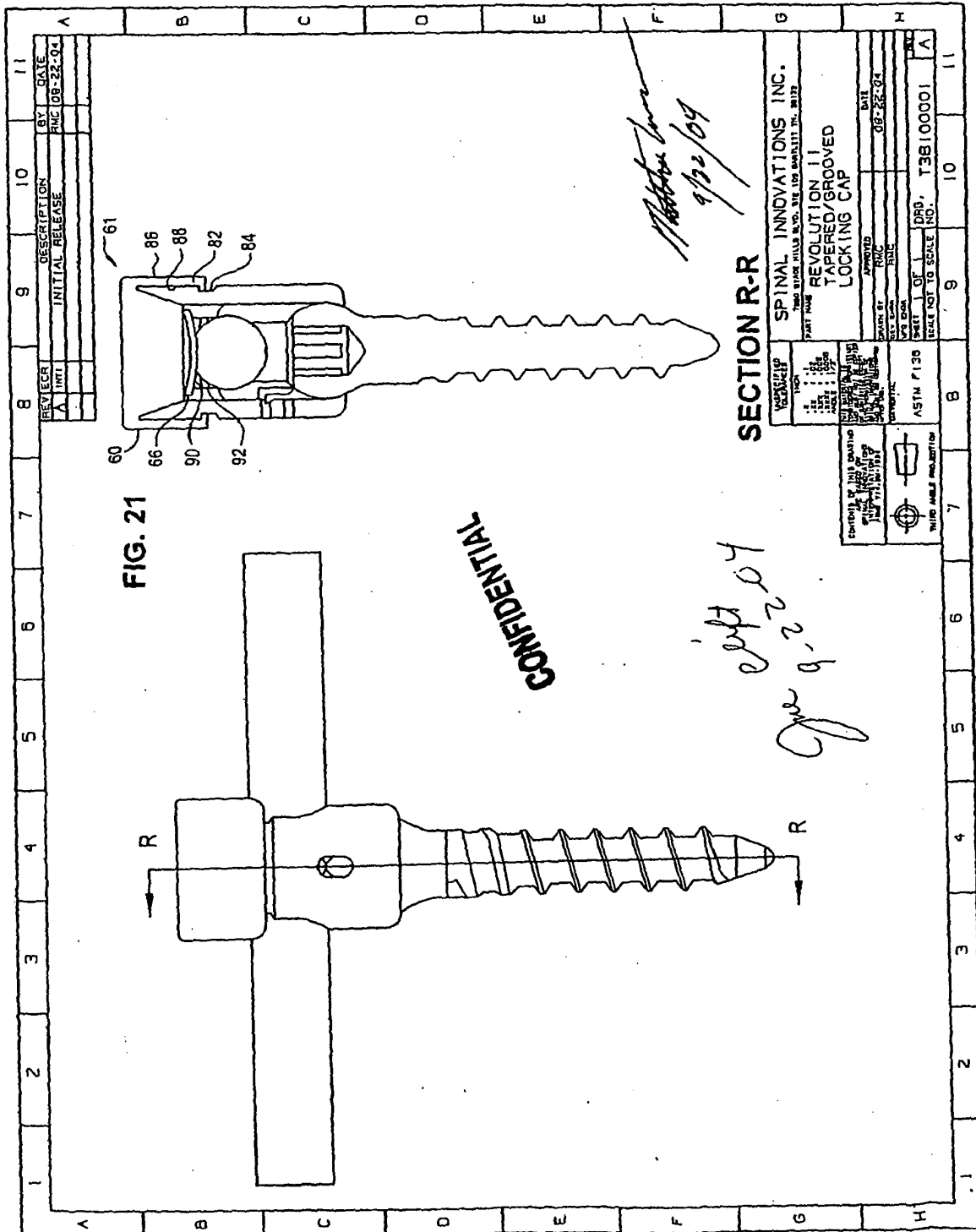


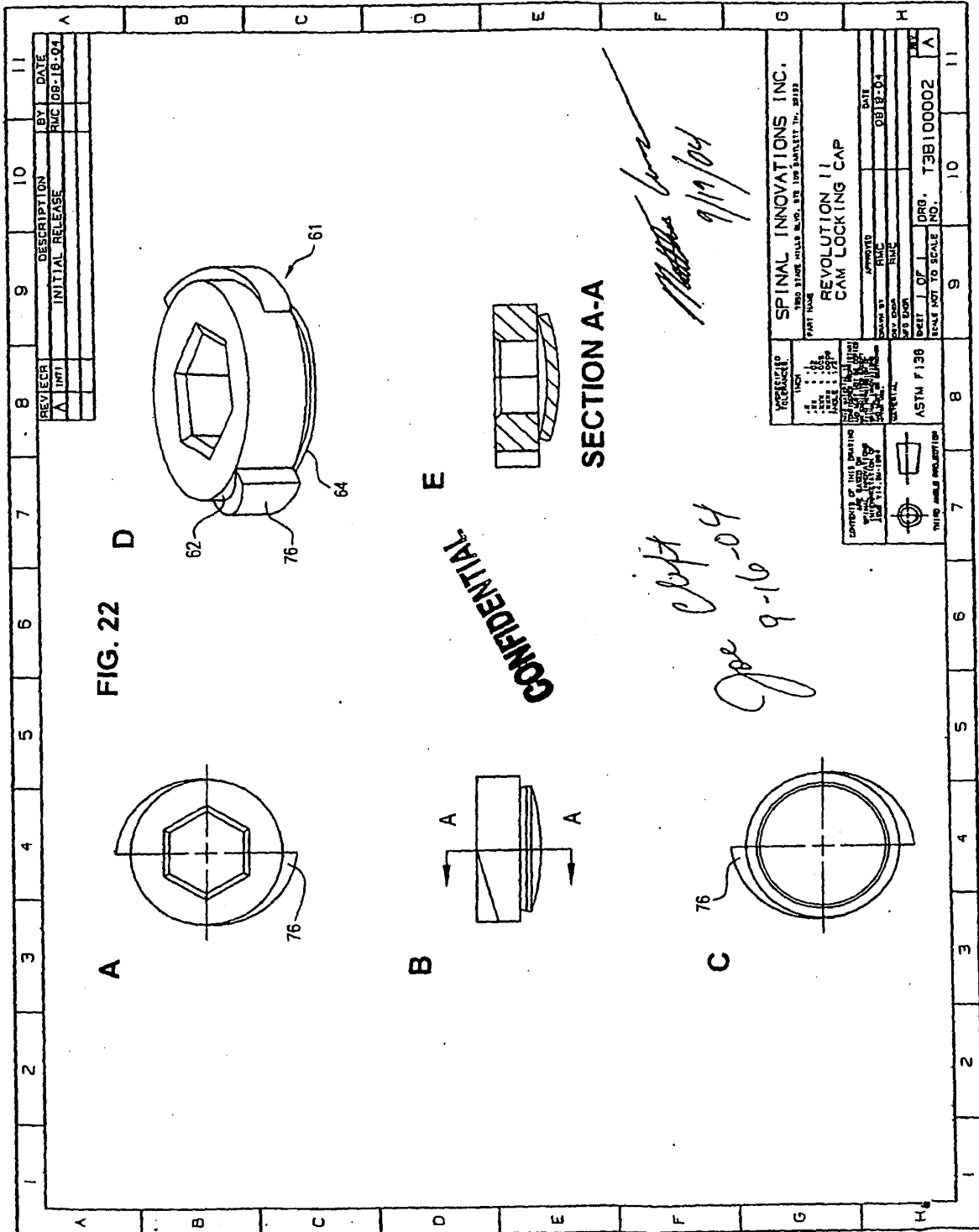


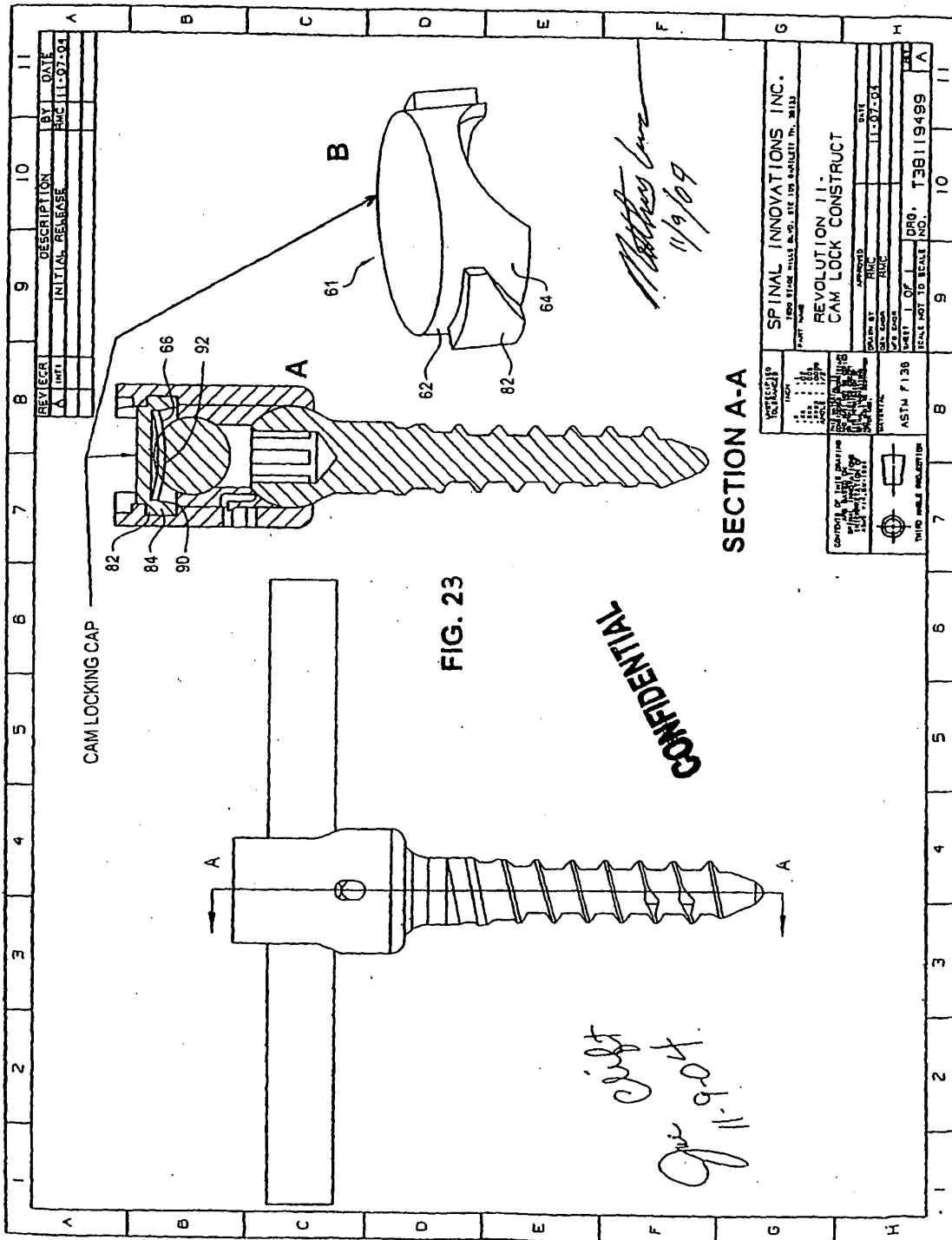












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